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SUBJECT: UNESCO DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S INFORMATION SESSION

¶1. Summary: At UNESCO Director-General Bokova's first information session for member states on February 4, the Director-General reiterated her intention to protect cultural property in Haiti and help rebuild that country's educational system. Bokova also reaffirmed her intention to work on girls' education, promising to present an initiative on the topic at the April Executive Board meeting. In the same vein, she announced that the Board will be asked to approve a proposed Category 2 regional research center on Women, Gender, and the Construction of Peace in the Great Lakes Region that would be established in Kinshasa. The Haitian representative was given the floor at the conclusion of the day-long meeting to thank to donor countries for their help in relief and reconstruction work in Haiti. His gratitude was very selective, however, as he managed to heap praise on Haiti's Latin American brothers (notably including President Chavez of Venezuela) but forgot to mention assistance from the U.S. and European countries. End Summary.

¶2. UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova held an all day briefing session for Executive Board members on February 4. This was the first time since taking office in mid-November 2009 that Bokova has held such a lengthy briefing. In doing so, she was following the tradition set by her predecessor, Koichiro Matsuura who made a habit of holding similar sessions in January and July every year. Bokova used the occasion to provide member states with an update on the evolution of her thinking on UNESCO's program and management. Following were the high points:

-- GIRLS' EDUCATION: UNESCO will be more vocal on women and girls who are still not enjoying equal education opportunities. "I am most encouraged that in discussion with leading personalities, including the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, First Ladies of Qatar and Egypt, among others, there is a commitment to launch an initiative on girls' and women's education. I will share my intentions with you at the Executive Board in April."

-- HAITI: The Haitian Education Minister and members of his staff are working out UNESCO's largely undamaged headquarter. UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Santiago, Chile, has made up to US DOLS 50,000 in regular program funds available to finance the mission of an education expert to Haiti. Contacts are on-going with nations of the Latin American group to see whether up to US DOLS 340,000 of funds earmarked for the Latin American activities of UNESCO's Participation Program can be used to finance educational projects in Haiti.

-- HAITI FLASH APPEAL: Brazil, Bulgaria, Japan, Norway, and Israel, have responded so the flash appeal. Brazil has agreed to fund the project on psycho-social support through teacher training (about U.S. DOLS. 400,000). Norway has seconded two specialists, and Israel has offered to provide an expert.

-- HAITI CULTURAL PROPERTY: The Director-General has written the Haitian Culture Minister proposing the creation of an international coordinating committee (ICC) to provide advice to Haiti on the safeguard of its cultural patrimony. (N.B. Creation of an ICC would require approval by UNESCO's Executive Board which next meets in April 2010.)

-- INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES: UNESCO will aim

to promote mutual understanding, elaborate a framework of common values, reinforce quality education and cross-cultural abilities, and encourage dialogue on sustainable development. An 18-member High-Panel for Peace and Dialogue among Cultures will be launched on February 18. Membership of this panel will not be closed. Others may be added later as the need arises. The panel will meet twice a year. The second meeting in 2010 will be held in New York toward the end of the year.

-- REORGANIZATION: Changes in structure must be based on what is working and what is not. First, UNESCO must renew its leadership team. Second, we should take account of the work of four internal task forces that were established on January 15 and are scheduled to report in March. One task force focuses on optimizing UNESCO's operations; two others focus on UNESCO's priority areas, gender equality and Africa; and the fourth will explore new ideas for partnerships and the mobilization of extra-budgetary funds. Any proposal for change will be put to the April Executive Board.

-- TEACHER TRAINING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: This program was the object of an external audit in 2009. We must now use our policy toolkit to carry out a comprehensive diagnosis of the program's needs. The Director of the Dakar Regional Education Bureau wrote to all African Ministers in December inviting their countries to participate in this exercise.

-- INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: "I had discussions with his Highness the Emir of Kuwait to establish a new trust fund dedicated to inclusive education."

-- HIGHER EDUCATION: We are facilitating the participation of Higher Education ministers from outside Europe at a Bologna Ministerial Conference in Vienna this coming March.

-- CLIMATE CHANGE: "I am in the process of launching a thematic workshop on climate change. Its mandate will be to sketch out concrete measures to implement the new initiative . . . I have also asked ADG Science to follow up on my discussions with the United Nations Environment Program and to put together a team which, on the basis of the agreement signed with that agency last April, will develop concrete initiatives in line with our climate change strategy."

-- BIO-DIVERSITY: "I have expressed UNESCO's interest in a project to create an intergovernmental platform on biodiversity and ecosystems services to promote exchange between scientists and policy-makers, similar to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). I will inform and consult the Executive Board when this proposal firms up."

-- HIGH-LEVEL SCIENCE PANEL: "I intend to establish a High-Level Panel on Science . . . to advise us on how best to focus and reorient our program to better respond to pressing needs and to map out avenues through which we can reinforce our links with international scientific bodies and gain our leadership in this important area."

-- KINSHASA CATEGORY 2 CENTER: A proposal to establish in Kinshasa a regional research center on Women, Gender, and the Construction of Peace in the Great Lakes Region will be put to the next Executive Board. An experts meeting will be held in Tanzania February 16-18 to finalize the legal documents establishing the center. The official launch of the center will probably be in May or June 2010. A donors meeting, including the African Development Bank, will probably be held at the same time as the launch ceremony.

-- INTERSECTORAL PLATFORMS: We have begun to take a critical look at the effectiveness of these platforms and have reached the conclusion that, while they successfully encouraged cross-fertilization of ideas, they were not securing effective high-level buy-in and results. We must, therefore, consider several options. We might reduce the number of platforms, or we might reformulate their work plans to focus on a limited number of high-level objectives. We must face the fact, however, that to achieve results, the platforms need dedicated funds.

-- JOURNALISTS: The Bureau of Public Information has been instructed to issue permanent accreditation and offer facilities to

those journalists who cover our activities regularly.

13. As the day-long meeting concluded, Haiti's representative Claude Moise was given the floor to give his country's thanks for the assistance being given since the January 12 earthquake. His gratitude, however, proved to be quite selective. He thanked the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Brazil, and several other Latin countries notably including Venezuela. (He thanked President Chavez by name, the only head of state he mentioned.) He made no mention, however, of U.S. assistance or that of the European Union and its member states. Instead, he went on to speculate that Haiti will experience political instability in the coming months, as Haitians will question the legitimacy of the current president and parliament who are nearing the end of their term. He ended this highly unusual intervention by speculating that there may be a need to reform Haiti's institutions of government profoundly in the year ahead. (Comment: Moise is new to UNESCO. A quick on-line search reveals him to be the author of a number of books on Haiti's history and governance. His predecessor was reportedly a victim of the January 12 earthquake. End Comment.)  
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